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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 HARARE 000643

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [ASEC](#) [PHUM](#) [ZI](#) [PINR](#)
SUBJECT: MSIKA'S DEATH AND HIS SUCCESSOR

Classified By: CDA Katherine Dhanani for reason 1.4 (d)

Vice President Msika's Death Made Official

¶11. (SBU) Zimbabwe's long-serving Vice President, Joseph Msika, died of liver and kidney failure the morning of August 5, 2009, according to the State media. (NOTE: The GOZ officially announced August 6 that Msika had died on August 5; we learned from sources that he actually died on August 4. END NOTE.) Msika had suffered several serious strokes during the past few years, had not been seen in public since March 2009, and was no longer a significant political force within ZANU-PF. He was 85 years old at the time of his death and had been the country's vice president since succeeding Joshua Nkomo in 1999. Msika was also a founding member of the PF-ZAPU independence party and a signatory to the 1987 Unity Accords that merged PF-ZAPU into ZANU-PF. In addition to his position as vice president, Msika, along with President Robert Mugabe, Vice President Joice Mujuru, and ZANU-PF Chairperson John Nkomo, was a member of the ZANU-PF ruling presidium. The ZANU-PF politburo met after his death and granted him "hero" status and a place in the National Hero's Acre.

The Battle for Succession and Mugabe's Dilemma

¶12. (C) The decision on who will replace Msika, although theoretically made by the politburo, is Mugabe's. In keeping with the historical precedent maintained since the 1987 Unity Accords, Mugabe is almost certain to fill the vacancy with an Ndebele. Additionally, he will seek to name an individual who will be loyal to him and, with an eye to the next election, can help rebuild the party in Matabeleland. His task is made difficult by the paucity of Ndebele leaders with national stature. Publicly known figures such as Minister of Mines Obert Mpofu, Ambassador to South Africa S. K. Moyo, and Bulawayo Governor Cain Mathewa are generally considered light weights. The leading contenders would appear to be John

Nkomo and Dumiso Dabengwa.

13. (C) Nkomo, who is almost 76 years old, is a long-standing member of ZANU-PF. Originally a member of PF-ZAPU and a one-time head of ZIPRA, the military arm of PF-ZAPU, Nkomo was an enthusiastic supporter of the Unity Accord. In addition to being Chair of ZANU-PF, Nkomo was Speaker of Parliament from 2005 to 2008 and has held various ministerial positions. He is unquestionably loyal to Mugabe. Because of this loyalty, however, he enjoys little support in Matabeleland which probably explains his decision not to stand for a parliamentary seat in the 2008 elections. He would be of little help in boosting ZANU-PF support in future elections. Nkomo also reportedly suffers from prostate cancer for which he receives treatment in South Africa. He would be a safe choice for Mugabe in the short term, but he would be a safe choice for Mugabe in the short term, but he offers little longer term reward.

14. (C) Dabengwa, who is 69, offers high risk but potentially significant benefits. He has a complicated history with Mugabe. He was the head of ZIPRA intelligence before independence and had a collaborative relationship with General Solomon Mujuru who headed ZANLA, the military wing of ZANU-PF. In 1982 the Mugabe administration charged Dabengwa with treason, alleging he was part of a PF-ZAPU effort to overthrow the government. After being acquitted, he was detained for four years under emergency measures. After release and rehabilitation, he served as Minister of Home Affairs between 1992 and 2000. He ran for Parliament in 2000 but lost to MDC stalwart Gibson Sibanda. He lost again in

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12005. Dabengwa was a member of the ZANU-PF politburo until the spring of 2008 when he announced his support of Simba Makoni for president. This year, he became interim head of a reconstituted ZAPU.

15. (C) Dabengwa is prominent in Matabeleland and could offer the possibility of strengthening ZANU-PF in that area. His electoral defeats -- almost certainly a result of his long and close association with ZANU-PF which is blamed for the Gukuruhundi massacres in the 1980s in Matabeleland -- calls this into question. Further, since he announced his support for Makoni, he has criticized Mugabe for being too old to effectively lead ZANU-PF and the country, and has attacked ZANU-PF as corrupt. Mugabe would also have other reasons to distrust Dabengwa's loyalty. Dabengwa is close to Solomon and Joice Mujuru, Mugabe's primary intraparty rivals, and he has a strong relationship with South African president Jacob Zuma who is a Mugabe critic. For his part, in the event an offer were made by Mugabe, Dabengwa would have to leave the party that he recently started. He would also have to take into account the reality that the Ndebele have historically been marginalized in ZANU-PF and that Mugabe might keep the wraps on him should he rejoin the party, even in the position of vice president.

And the Winner is?

16. (C) ZANU-PF politics are opaque, primarily because one man makes the decisions and rarely tips his hand to others. Since Mugabe is primarily concerned about himself and wants to stay in office indefinitely, the most likely pick -- because it's the safest pick for him personally -- is Nkomo. But we don't underestimate Mugabe's ability to surprise. He could work out a deal with Dabengwa, choose the junior and lightly-regarded Mpofu, or do something unforeseen. A more remote possibility is that Mugabe will scrap the Unity Accord and choose a Shona vice Ndebele as Msika's replacement. To do so, however, would be to give up completely on electoral support from Matabeleland and to give up any pretense of ZANU-PF as a national party. On balance, it is unlikely that Msika's death will affect the current political situation.

Mugabe will continue to cling to power and control his party, and the party will continue to drag its feet on the Global Political Agreement.

DHANANI